

For readers who may be reasonably wondering about the delay with these reports, your correspondent apologises for technical difficulties.

L'Odeur de Perpignan

It may be September, but summer is far from over in Perpignan. The air was not only hot but humid yesterday, forcing attendees to fan themselves at maximum speed. And when the wind blows, the particular pungency of the Perpignan waste system blows with it.

Here's to the coldest summer of the rest of our lives!

Spotlight: Mads Nissen

We all think we know what cocaine looks like, but the Danish photographer Mads Nissen will tell you—with the piercing blue eyes and sense of moral clarity that live up to stereotypes of his nation—most pictures online of cocaine are not authentic. Either they are other things pretending to be cocaine (flour, baking powder, etc.), or they are images provided by police forces, meaning they bear the same relationship to photojournalism that press releases do to news reports.

Nissen shows you what cocaine really looks like, from the poor farmers growing the leaves, through to the smuggling boats and border stops, to the gangs and dealers who distribute them, with particular attention to the unlucky souls who are coerced, with violence or with the brute force of economics, to work within these cartel networks.

To take one photo as an example: A man has been caught smuggling at a Mexican airport. With a slick haircut and a fur coat, it would be easy to imagine him as a career criminal. But, as Nissen will tell you with a level of detail and empathy that bespeaks the attention he pays to his subjects, this is a man who used to work as a wedding planner. With the pandemic, his business dropped off completely, and he had to borrow money. The banks wouldn't give him credit, so he turned to the gangs. Soon, he was heavily in debt, and was made to work as a drug mule under threat of violence to his family—it will be many years until he is released from his Mexican prison. He is just one of many individuals trapped in cruel circumstances, whose lives are obscured by the cheap rhetoric and cruel policies of the War on Drugs.

The exhibition ends with images of the moneyed Europeans who enjoy

these drugs—people not far removed from some of the viewers in the Couvent des Minimes. By themselves, these pictures could be (particularly artful, considered) advertisements for nightclubs. But in the context of the whole exhibition, they look like the pleasures that these rich white nations buy at the expense of suffering, exploitation, and violence in the Global South.

Spotlight: Gaël Turine

First uppers, then downers.

Turine, who appeared in these reports previously for his remarkable, harrowing Arte Reportage project on Haiti, has an exhibition at Perpignan on 'Kush,' a synthetic drug more than fifty times as addictive as heroin, which sells for 0.30€. In his images, we see the wretched lives of addicts in Liberia who think of nothing but how to get the next hit, their eyes glazed, their bodies contorted, their homes nothing more than heaps of rubbish.

Turine is nothing if not thoughtful about his work. Again, a single image shows the pains he takes to 'strike the right balance.' A woman lies sprawled on top of another man. Her pose is not that different to one sleeping, but it is different: she is stretched, listless, with a distinct sheen on her skin. Half an hour before the image was taken, Turine had been talking to this couple, and reached an agreement to take a portrait of them. Then, his fixer told him he had to leave immediately. When he came back, he found them like this, transported by a Kush high. There is beauty in the image, but it is intermingled with an inhuman horror that embodies the artificial pleasure destroying these people's lives.

Asked about the junkies panhandling on the streets of Perpignan, and whether European drug consumption would be a future project, Turine said yes, with a surprising caveat: it would be the most dangerous project of his series on drugs. This correspondent was incredulous: more dangerous than Liberia? Yes, he answered, not only because the dealers and users of Western Europe are violent, but because they know the outlets where his work is published, they know what it means for him to show their face.

This has been a theme throughout the festival: it's not only economics that is making the work of photojournalists harder, but also the fact that people are increasingly aware of the potential of an image to be spread and seen—and to incriminate them.

Campo Santo—Night Three

It was awards night on Campo Santo on Wednesday, with photographers honoured for work from Britain to Gaza. The constant across the acceptance speeches were tributes to the support and encouragement Jean-François Leroy gave these winners from the beginnings of their photographic careers. Most memorably: Guillaume Herbaut described how he went into Jean-François Leroy's office early in his career to show him his work. As a shy, nervous twenty-something, he kept babbling while he displayed the prints. The great founder of Visa pour l'Image told him simply: shut up—the photos can do the talking.

The images on screen were great, but the screenings ran late with the awards ceremony, and this correspondent felt that he, and much of the audience, was too tired and sweaty to give these images all the attention they deserved. While nothing matched the Kanye West sample of the previous night, the Nine Inch Nails song 'Hurt' was, at the very least, a curious choice for a piece on immigration raids and authoritarian brutality in Trump's America. 'You can have it all/My empire of dirt'?

And a table at *Café de la Poste* at last! But, o cruel fate, our table was at the far north end of the feted establishment—as it was a far-from-balmy 26°, we were treated to the stench of Perpignan sewage. Will we ever have a night at *Café de la Poste* without complications? Only time will tell.

À demain!

- FSB

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